**Matthew 5:38-48 (ESV)**

**38**  “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ **39** But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. **40** And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. **41** And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. **42**  Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. **43**  “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ **44** But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **45**  so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. **46**  For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? **47** And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? **48**  You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

**“Perfectly Loved To Love”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Before taking up the topic of “loving our enemies,” there must be clarification. First off, what Jesus addresses does not dismiss or change the role of government. He is speaking not to the world, but those who hear and believe His Word. They are the light and salt apart from the rules needed to order any society. Luther tells us, “Jesus is not saying: “No one should ever resist evil”; for that would completely undermine all rule and authority. But this is what He is saying: “You, you shall not do it.” Now, who are these “you”? They are the disciples of Christ, whom He is teaching about their personal lives, apart from the secular government. As we have said often enough, being a Christian is something quite different from holding and administering a secular office or position” (LW Vol. 21).

At the same time, in the Church, there is the need to prevent false teaching and life against enemies of the Gospel. St. Paul as an apostle and preacher of the Word told the Corinthian Church, “According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.” Likewise, Christ revealed the threat of the enemy during His last week in Jerusalem saying, “See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray” (Matthew 24:4-5). What Jesus takes up on His Sermon on The Mount becomes icing on the cake to the Law of love. It goes beyond anger hidden in our sinful hearts, but with acts of love toward our enemies. Perfectly loved by Christ means impossible love is for a sinful world.

None can grasp the fullness of love when there are enemies. At the time of Christ, plenty of people in Israel saw themselves surrounded by enemies. A riotous and violent spirit existed against the Gentiles, especially with Roman occupation over the Promised Land. The Jews saw their own half-breed family, the Samaritans, an offense and threat to a pure way of life. We even know that within the ranks of the Sadducees and Pharisees there was much rivalry. It was in such lovelessness, God spoke His Holy Word of love. Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.” Jesus exposed the adjustment sinners made to the perfect Law of love to justify loveless actions. The Pharisees misinterpreted the enemies of Israel, God’s nation in the Old Testament, to be reason enough to hate their personal enemies for all time.

None grasps this fullness of love still today. We think it is only about family, acts of kindness, and just being an overall good person. St. Paul warns us, “If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God.” The Wisdom of Christ in view of the perfect law of love tells the truth. It goes deeper than our comforts, what brings us a benefit, or means a happy outcome. Jesus said, “For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?” This kind of love can exist between selfish people, those who do evil, and even sadly can be in the church. However, it misses the perfect law of love demanded by Christ. We must confess to Him unfulfilled love toward those who wronged us, been hostile, violent, and unloving. Enemies are more than at a distance, but someone we might face every day.

Only Christ loved His enemies showing no favoritism only forgiveness. He did not call his enemies good nor did He compromise the truth for a false love of self. Instead, as the Son of the Father, He suffered a sinful world to the point of death on the cross. Jesus does not reveal the perfect law of love unless He Himself would fulfill it perfectly for us. None other rises to demands for such love as Jesus told the rich young man, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (Matthew 19:21). Christ achieved what we could not as the perfect Savior. His love fully built the basis of saving faith in Him. The works of man no matter how loving, great, or glorious cannot replace this love sent from the Father in His Son. St. Paul tells the Church, “For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

Forgiveness is the perfect love Christ has made as the centerpiece. He presents this in all humility being the servant by His Word and Sacrament. As an early Church Father declares, “The law of the Lord transcends both the law of nature and the law revealed to Moses. For the things that are impossible with humans are possible with God” (ACC). Where enemies abound for us still today, the love of God has destroyed the true enemies that control all men. Sin, death, and the Devil have no power before the love of Jesus and His sacrifice. St. Paul says, “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life” (Romans 5:10). His life seeks to turn enemies into friends. His life delivers by a word of forgiveness that is light in the darkness. His life reigns to redeem with love what none other can love. By water, bread and wine Jesus claims His body, God’s temple in this world, and we are holy, perfectly whole, because of Him.

The Church has the impossible love from God that a sinful world needs to see. God perfectly has won by the sacrifice of Jesus. No business unfished, no more vengeance to bring upon the world. As the psalmist proclaimed, “He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him” (Psalms 103:10-11). The call by Jesus to be perfect is not a work of the Law, but a perspective of the Gospel He places upon His baptized people. As Dr. Scaer a seminary professor notes, “…Matthew’s call for perfection was a plea to be merciful, that is, forgiving, as God himself was” (Sermon the Mount 138). In other words, we adopt an attitude that, yes, can even love our enemies. It means we lose, we suffer, and we end up as a witness of love that reveals Christ. St. Paul knew this life well saying, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21).

This love for good goes beyond continual acts of mercy toward those who seek to be our enemy. It goes to the highest realm of love before God, “to pray for those who persecute you.” This is what Christ did on the cross to His Father in heaven saying, “…they know not what they do.” It is what Stephen declared to the risen Christ when being stoned, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60). How closely does the Lord’s Prayer teach us God’s goodness of daily bread for a whole sinful world goes hand in hand with His generosity to, “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” We always fall short of perfect love, but the potency rests perfectly in Christ. This love we did not build, conceive, or keep safe by our hands. It comes from the only true Son of the Father. His Word is truth, but also is love as Savior. His presence is real, even when proclaiming His death until He comes. Perfectly loved by Christ means impossible love is for a sinful world. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.